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Chair: Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon)
Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Ruiz Massieu

Contents

Agenda item 136: Programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019 *(continued)*

Status of implementation of the information and communications technology strategy for the United Nations

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 136: Programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019 (*continued*)

Status of implementation of the information and communications technology strategy for the United Nations (A/72/7/Add.51, A/72/151 and A/72/755/Rev.1)

1. **Mr. Avan** (Office of Information and Communications Technology), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the status of implementation of the information and communications technology strategy for the United Nations (A/72/755/Rev.1), said that technology and data were instrumental to the inner workings of the United Nations and critical to programme delivery and the fulfilment of mandates. The information and communications technology (ICT) strategy had established a common vision for ICT delivery in the United Nations through modernization, transformation and innovation, based on a framework of improved governance and an effective balance between central leadership and operational freedom. Significant progress had been made in implementation of the strategy. Spending on ICT had been reduced by approximately $100 million and annual costs had been streamlined, creating efficiencies in ICT services and allowing for more investments in strategic deliverables.

2. A new email system had been deployed globally to 55,000 users, providing for efficiencies in the management of email, uniform security policies and improved collaboration. The Enterprise Application Centres had reduced the number of applications from 2,340 in 2014 to 1,220 in 2017. The Centres were providing technical solutions to support the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse across the Secretariat. The Enterprise Application Centre in Vienna had developed software that was being used by dozens of Member States to fight organized crime, money-laundering and narcotics trafficking. The Inspira talent and learning management system had been enhanced and key enterprise solutions to support the management of contingent-owned equipment, fuel and rations had also been implemented and enhanced.

3. The Office of Information and Communications Technology had provided support for the deployment of the Umoja enterprise resource planning system through global network harmonization and improved integration. A single global network for one United Nations had been established by interconnecting 594 United Nations locations. The Unite Service Desk provided global, round-the-clock support for Umoja and other enterprise applications. The time to resolve support requests had decreased by 66 per cent; more than 108,000 such requests had been received in 2017.

4. With cyberattacks emerging as a significant threat to the United Nations and its work, the ICT security road map had resulted in more secure enterprise systems and applications in the Secretariat. A mandatory information security awareness course had been developed for staff and authorized ICT users; over 80 per cent of Secretariat users had completed the course by December 2017. In addition, a Digital Blue Helmets team had been established to help protect the United Nations from cyberthreats and promote cybersecurity.

5. Efforts were under way on the United Nations digital agenda, which would leverage technology to facilitate the Organization's work in the areas of peace and security, human rights, international law, social and economic development, and humanitarian affairs. The Office had developed 150 business intelligence reports in all administrative areas and 50 dashboards for administrative and substantive areas. Innovative solutions had been implemented in order to support efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Innovation had accelerated with the piloting of Technology Innovation Labs, the exploration of crowdsourcing opportunities and the delivery of technology awareness-raising initiatives.

6. A total of $381.3 million had been approved for ICT under the regular budget for 2018–2019, the same amount as for 2016–2017. ICT resources under the peacekeeping budgets had decreased from a total of $851.9 million during the 2016–2017 biennium to an estimated $747.9 million during the 2018–2019 biennium. Extrabudgetary resources had decreased from $184.9 million for the 2016–2017 biennium to an estimated $181.5 million for the 2018–2019 biennium. Total ICT personnel would decrease from 3,387 in 2015 to an estimated 2,950 by the end of 2018.

7. Strong leadership had been critical to the success of the strategy to date. The Secretary-General's bulletin on the organization of the Office of Information and Communications Technology (ST/SGB/2016/11) laid down the internal policies and procedures for the designation and delegation of authority. The Enterprise Project Management Office ensured that ICT projects and performance were monitored effectively. He was confident that the efforts of the Office of Information and Communications Technology would enable transformation that promoted innovation and a data-driven approach at all levels and that the long-term goal of coherent, reliable and efficient ICT in the United Nations was achievable.

8. **Mr. Bajaj** (Chair of the Audit Operations Committee of the Board of Auditors), introducing the first annual progress report of the Board of Auditors on the implementation of the ICT strategy (A/72/151), said that the report, which had been issued in July 2017, examined the implementation of the strategy in 2015 and 2016. The Secretary-General's bulletin defining the organization of the Office of Information and Communications Technology (ST/SGB/2016/11) had been issued in September 2016, almost two years after the commencement of the five-year strategy.

9. As of February 2017, the delegation of authority and designation of staff members performing significant functions in the Office had not yet been issued. The provision in senior managers' compacts regarding implementation of the strategy was subjective and generic in nature and did not facilitate an objective assessment of senior managers' performance in implementing the strategy. Departments had not yet aligned their business plans to the strategy and continued to operate their own ICT units.

10. The monitoring of projects involved the continuous tracking of physical and financial progress to control time and cost overruns and execute projects efficiently and effectively. While the Secretary-General's first and second reports on the status of implementation of the strategy (A/70/364 and Corr.1 and A/71/400) presented the project timelines and the physical progress achieved, they did not provide details of progress on costs and financing for each of the 20 strategic projects.

11. Policies had not yet been promulgated or revised on important subjects, such as information security, disaster recovery, cloud computing, minimum security for websites, videoconferencing, mobile devices, email services or remote access. A policy compliance function to monitor, measure and report on policy implementation had not yet been put in place. Moreover, a self-regulatory policy compliance function had not yet been fully implemented owing to lack of resources. Although ICT training programmes had been developed, they could not be implemented owing to lack of resources. The funds provided for substantive and technical ICT skills training represented less than 5 per cent of the training requirements projected by the Office of Information and Communications Technology.

12. By the end of 2015, significant progress had been made on implementation of the strategic project for information security across the Secretariat, with 60 per cent of the project completed. However, further progress of only 5 per cent had been achieved in 2016. The limited progress in the areas of network security, classification of information assets and mandatory implementation of minimum requirements for public websites was a matter of concern.

13. While the strategy emphasized that the Office of Information and Communications Technology would oversee and monitor ICT investments to enable more informed decision-making and holistic reporting of global costs, the Office and the Chief Information Technology Officer had had limited involvement in ICT procurement. The strategy required the negotiation of contract discounts using the global purchasing volume of hardware and software licenses. Although the Secretary-General's reports indicated that the Organization negotiated discounts in the areas of infrastructure, externally acquired licenses and related ICT services, the Office had not carried out any analysis of discounts obtained through global outsourcing.

14. Progress in the consolidation of ICT resources was slow; only 3 out of 70 ICT units in the Secretariat had been consolidated as of January 2017.

15. Lastly, he noted that of the 23 recommendations made by the Board previously, 2 had been implemented and 21 were under implementation.

16. **Mr. Ruiz Massieu** (Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/72/7/Add.51), said that it was regrettable that progress had slowed in several areas during the reporting period, including in the implementation of the remaining strategic ICT projects and in defragmenting and consolidating ICT capacities.

17. The Advisory Committee welcomed the implementation of the information security action plan and the establishment of an information security roadmap to address evolving security threats. It remained concerned, however, by the slow progress in reducing the fragmentation of ICT in the Secretariat, which had resulted in an increased threat level.

18. The Advisory Committee looked forward to receiving further information on the study currently under way to address the proliferation of applications and develop a strategy to manage the Secretariat's portfolio of applications. The strategy should be based on policies and guidelines that would clarify, inter alia, the functions or areas to be covered centrally by the Enterprise Application Centres and those that could be addressed at the local level.

19. The Advisory Committee emphasized the need to address continued weaknesses in ICT governance and accountability and reiterated that all Secretariat entities must fully comply with all the provisions of General

Assembly resolution 69/262 and ST/SGB/2016/11. The cooperation of managers was critical for the successful implementation of the ICT strategy. The senior managers' compacts should contain specific performance measures that would allow for assessment of their performance in managing ICT activities.

20. The Advisory Committee had requested the Board of Auditors to make a comprehensive inventory of ICT capacities across the Secretariat in order to establish a baseline against which to measure future progress and trends. Furthermore, given the magnitude of annual expenditure on ICT, the Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to include in the budget and budget performance documents of each Secretariat entity information on its ICT expenditure and capacities, with details on elements such as personnel, assets and projects.

21. **Mr. Ismail** (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the implementation of the ICT strategy endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 69/262 was crucial to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, transparency, credibility and accountability of the Organization. Progress on that implementation had been uneven at best. The Secretary-General should take immediate corrective action to ensure Secretariat-wide compliance and should provide a detailed update in his next report on the matter.

22. In informal consultations, the Group would seek explanations for why policies had not yet been issued for the delegation of authority and designation of staff members to perform significant ICT functions; why senior managers' compacts did not contain specific performance measures for the implementation of the strategy; and why annual ICT workplans had not been prepared consistently for all Secretariat entities. The Group wondered why the Secretariat apparently found it difficult to establish targets and monitoring mechanisms that would align departmental business plans with the ICT strategy and ensure that it was implemented in accordance with the related General Assembly resolutions.

23. He welcomed the valuable insights provided by the Board of Auditors on areas where progress had been made and where further change and improvement were needed. The Group urged the Secretary-General to address the low rate of implementation of the Board's recommendations and expected that the remaining recommendations would be implemented without further delay.

24. The Board of Auditors had previously identified certain limitations of the ICT strategy, including a lack of emphasis on the enterprise resource planning system, insufficient prioritization of information on security issues and insufficient recognition of peacekeeping activities. Given that peacekeeping accounted for some 75 per cent of overall ICT expenditure, the Committee should discuss ways of addressing those gaps.

25. It was a matter of concern that a large number of legacy applications and websites posed information security risks. The Secretary-General should provide a detailed update on the status of remaining legacy systems and outline a plan to consolidate those systems and accelerate standardization across the Organization.

26. Given that the management of the core infrastructure of Umoja had been outsourced to a commercial vendor, the Group wished to receive further information on the measures taken to ensure the protection and confidentiality of data uploaded to the system. The Group also looked forward to receiving further analysis of the cost savings and economies of scale to be achieved through systems contracts for the procurement of equipment and services.

27. **Mr. Conroy** (United States of America) said that the ICT strategy had been designed to modernize the ICT function in the Secretariat, optimize resource use and enhance innovation. His delegation continued to support efforts to achieve those goals and noted that impressive headway had been made, under the leadership of the Chief Information Technology Officer, in implementing the strategy. He nevertheless shared the concerns expressed by the Advisory Committee and the Board of Auditors that Secretariat-wide compliance remained a challenge. An increased level of coordination and cooperation in the Secretariat, and perhaps even across the United Nations system, was essential for achieving maximum effectiveness and efficiency. His delegation looked forward to receiving detailed updates on progress for all Secretariat entities and encouraged the Secretary-General to continually refine cost projections as implementation continued and planning assumptions were adjusted.

28. The Committee was considering an important management reform proposal to establish a single Office of Information and Communications Technology through the consolidation of the existing Office in the Department of Management and the Information and Communications Technology Division in the Department of Field Support. Given that ICT was a cross-cutting function that underpinned the Organization's core mandates and activities, a single entity with a holistic approach would enhance the delivery of ICT services to clients. The unified structure would expedite the full implementation of the ICT

strategy and would make it possible to better use technology and innovation to advance the core work of the Organization. His delegation remained dedicated to bringing the United Nations into the twenty-first century and achieving transformational reform and cost containment.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.